

Senate battles for Nixon's tapes

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate pushed toward a final vote Thursday on a bill to assure the public and courts full access to Richard M. Nixon's White House tapes and papers.

By voice vote, senators adopted a

resolution urging President Ford to do what he could to make public all the facts about the Watergate scandal, including any relevant documents from Nixon's 5½ years in office.

But the big battle was over the bill

F.P. 10-4-74
giving the federal government custody and control of the tapes and papers, a measure designed to overturn an arrangement Nixon worked out with the Ford administration before he was pardoned last month.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Gaylord Nelson, D-Wis., was prompted by a provision in the Nixon-Ford agreement that would allow the former president to destroy the papers after three years and the tapes after five years. In case of Nixon's death the tapes would be destroyed immediately.

"Destruction of these materials would conceal forever the truth about the Watergate scandals," said Nelson. "Our generation and future generations would thus be unable to learn exactly what happened and why."

Sen. Roman L. Hruska, R-Neb., led the fight against the bill, calling it unconstitutional on grounds it would violate the concept of executive privilege and infringe on Nixon's freedom of speech and his right to privacy.

"If the president's papers can be seized and disclosed to the world, then surely the private papers of a senator or a congressman or perhaps a corporation president, union leader or other well-known person could be seized and disclosed to all potential litigants and to the curious," Hruska said.

Sen. Robert Griffin, R-Mich., attempted to require that the official papers of all future presidents and of members of Congress are public property, but his amendment was killed, 47 to 32.

"What did we have to do with Watergate?" asked Sen. Russell B. Long, D-La., in arguing against the Griffin proposal.